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AUTHOR Oliver, Ronald L.
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ABSTRACT

Most student teachers are not exposed to employment procedures of district administrators. Some placement offices may offer suggestions for preparing for interviews, but placement officers are counselors, not administrators. Even if a student teacher has strong background in a subject area, has done well in education courses, and has those characteristics desired in effective teaching situations, knowledge about employment procedures is essential. This document is given to all seniors at Northwestern Oklahoma State University to help them prepare for possible employment. The emphasis is not on the actual interview (but there is one short section discussing interview techniques). The emphasis instead is on the total employment procedure. The document is written from an administrative point of view since student teachers will be in contact with school district administrators during the employment procedure. (Author/JD)

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District Employment Procedures: A Guide for Student Teachers

Ronald L. Oliver

Northwestern Oklahoma State University

Department of Education

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Abstract

Most student teachers are not exposed to employment procedures of district administrators. Some placement offices may offer suggestions for preparing for interviews, but placement officers are counselors, not administrators. Even if a student teacher has strong background in his/her subject area, has done well in education courses, and has those characteristics desired in effective teaching situations the student teacher will not be hired if he/she is not knowledgeable about employment procedures. This short document is given to all seniors at Northwestern Oklahoma State University to help them prepare for possible employment. The emphasis is not on the actual interview (but there is one short section discussing interview techniques). The emphasis instead is on the total employment procedure. The document is written from an administrative point of view since student teachers will be in contact with school district administrators during the employment procedure. An additional document is available to students regarding interview procedures, and this document is written from the administrative point of view.

District Employment Procedures:

A Guide for Student Teachers

Most student teachers are not exposed to employment procedures of district administrators. Even if you have a strong background in your subject area, do well in your education courses, and have effective teaching techniques you will not be hired if you are not knowledgeable about district employment procedures. This short document should help you prepare for possible employment. The emphasis is not on the actual interview (but there is one short section discussing interview techniques). You will be given an additional document regarding interview procedures. This document is written from an administrative point of view since you will be in contact with school administrators during the employment procedure. There is a one page summary of typical employment procedures. Each of the major stages during the employment procedure process is clarified.

Typical Employment Procedures

1. receipt of letter of resignation or creation of a new position
2. notification to principals and in-district teachers of the vacancy
3. decision (yes or no) to hire an in-district teacher for the position
4. advertisement of vacancy to external agencies (if in-district teacher is not recommended)
5. acceptance of applications
6. screening process (review of total application, examination of credentials, verification of degree, analysis of experience)
7. personal interview
8. selection process
9. recommendation to the local board of education
10. board of education appointment
11. notification of candidates

Source of Applicants

School administrators have a wide range of possible sources for obtaining possible teacher applicants. Many times the source will be dependent upon the position. If an administrator is seeking a first year teacher, he/she often will turn to university education departments, university placement offices, and individual university professors. Often there is a strong professional working relationship between school administrators and higher education personnel.

If the administrator is seeking to hire an experienced teacher the source list will include other district superintendents, other district secondary principals, and district teachers. As teachers gain experience they gain additional references (which can be good or bad). A common procedure is having district superintendents post each other on possible job openings in their district.

Recently superintendents have turned to newspapers to advertise position openings. The reasons for this source are affirmative action requirements and teacher shortages in certain secondary positions.

At the elementary level, districts receive applications at random. Many elementary teachers are willing to teach at any level and are not limited to one or two specialties required of secondary teachers. Sometimes districts may not even list a position as being open if there are numerous applications already on file from random job seekers.

Another example of not advertising a position is when a district decides to hire a past substitute teacher who has done an above-average job in the district. Substitute teaching is an excellent way to gain some experience if you do not need a full time position.

If the district decides to hire a teacher who is already employed within the system (teacher lateral job change) then there will be a vacancy created by that teacher. Districts often give their own staff first choice of any newly created positions or vacancies from resignations.

One of the easiest ways for obtaining the first teaching position is to do an outstanding job of student teaching. This will result in good recommendations and may give you a teaching position in the district.

Position Guides

Most large districts and many small districts have written position guides for advertised positions. Copies are usually available to candidates. Positions guides include position title, position code, primary function, major classroom responsibilities, special assignments, organizational responsibilities, performance standards, and qualifications.

Teacher applicants will be able to judge from the position guide the basic minimum qualifications for the vacancy. If the position guide lists such requirements as head football coach, department head, currriculum director, etc., to go along with the teaching duties then first year teachers should not apply because the district wants someone with experience.

Districts try to balance their staffs by having both young and old teachers and experienced and non-experienced teachers. The position guide will not necessarily reflect these basics. If the district wishes to hire a teacher with little or no teaching experience the position guide will not have any abnormally high qualifications such as an advanced college degree, public school experience, or specific skills in extra-curricular activities.

Formal Application

Districts will base who they interview on the written materials submitted by applicants. First year teachers should send the following information to the local board of education office regarding possible employment: initial letter of application, resume, credentials, transcripts, a copy of the teaching certificate, a completed district application, and all pertinent supporting facts.

The initial letter of application should be short. Candidates should take the responsibility to have a one page resume included in the application package. Credentials should be mailed from the local university placement office. This may be accomplished by a phone call, followed up by a letter, requesting formal credentials be mailed to a specific school district. Unofficial copies of all work done are usually acceptable, but formal transcripts must be sent before accepting a contract. The copy of the teaching certificate will list each specific area the applicant can teach. District applications should be typed. Any pertinent supporting information should be included to supplement the application. A personal photograph is optional.

References

You should have five to eight references listed in your credentials. Most principals prefer a closed-file, and most educators prefer writing closed-files. This protects the confidentiality of the writer and presents a true picture of the opinion of the reference.

At least one of the references should be from the student's major field of study. There should be a reference from the department of education. Student teachers should ask their cooperating teacher for a reference. The other references can be from any of the above and/or from the world of business. Be sure to ask the reference in advance if you can use him/her and then have the placement office mail your reference an official recommendation sheet for placement in your credentials.

Many administrators will call references listed in the credential file. This will happen before the actual interview so you may be asked pertinent questions pertaining to information received by the principal by phone from confidential references.

Personal Interview

The personal interview is the key to employment. Impressions left with school administrators will determine the chances of being the successful applicant.

Be sure and be 10 to 15 minutes early for the interview. Dress appropriately. You may be asked for a short summary of your personal and professional background. Each of the following may be explained: working conditions, pay, teacher handbook, student handbook, unusual district policies, and district employment procedures. Principals are usually not interested in your philosophy, but are interested in how you can support your philosophy. Possible questions will range from student discipline to teaching techniques. You may be shown through the physical plant including your classroom. Some principals allow applicants to speak with other teachers in the building and/or students.

If you are married it will be appropriate to take your spouse with you to the interview. Allow two to three hours for the actual interview, and do not schedule more than one interview per day. As soon as you get home, write the principal a thank-you note confirming your interest in the position.

Selection Process

The initial screening of applicants is normally the job of the building principal. Principals will pick up all application packages from the board of education office and then begin the selection process. Depending on the district and type of administrative style of the superintendent, principals may screen and then interview three to five applicants per position. A common procedure, depending on the type of position, is to have the principal recommend the top applicant to the superintendent of schools. The superintendent will have a personal interview with the top applicant. If the superintendent and principal are both satisfied with the top applicant, he/she will be recommended to the board of education for employment. For teaching positions not requiring coaching, major club sponsorships, departmental administrative responsibilities, etc., most of the time teacher applicants will not have to meet formally with the board of education.

Teachers are not hired without a formal interview. While a curtious phone call to the principal regarding the current status of the job search is always permissible, it can be overdone. Teachers are hired based on qualifications, not phone calls.

Applicant Appraisal

Each administrator has his/her own idea of the desired characteristics for the successful applicant. Just because you are not the final choice in one district does not mean you have little or no chance in other districts.

There are several common factors which may determine your chances of being employed. Principals will evaluate your transcript including your overall grade point average, major subject grade point average, and grade point average in education courses including student teaching. You should have had responsible positions in growth situations. These could have included scouting, church work, outside jobs, high school and college activities, and community service. Geographical preferences are analyzed including the size and location of the school. Can you help in outside activities such as club sponsorships, activity trips, student activities, and specific district responsibilities? You should have some type of minimum computer training.

In the end, the principal will decide if you are right for the district and if the district is right for you. This will be based on why you want the position and your qualifications.

The Employment Offer

Many districts will have two formal interviews with the successful applicant. The first interview will be with the building principal. The successful applicant will have a second interview with the district superintendent. The superintendent may make an employment offer, but the final decision is up to the board of education.

Personnel recommendations are considered at the first board meeting of each month, usually the first week of the month on a Monday or Tuesday. If the board of education approves the recommendation of the district administration, only then can the superintendent formally offer a contract.

Depending on the time of the year, districts will interview candidates and try to make a decision several days after the last interview. You should be prepared to give a definite yes or no if offered the contract. Do not hold up a district hoping for a better offer.

The first recommendation of the administration may not want the position. Many times the top applicant for one position will also be the top applicant for a position in another district. Do not give up hope. If you are interviewed you probably have a chance.

Summary

Employment procedures vary by administrator and by district. Procedures will depend on the position, district requirements, and administrative philosophy. From the time the board of education formally acts on a letter of resignation or decides to create a new position there will be about a two to four day time lapse to notify placement offices. The position will stay open about another month. Interviews take one or two weeks with an additional week to make an employment decision. Board of education approval will be at the first monthly meeting. The entire process may take three months.

The key to the employment procedure is the personal interview. Interview procedures will vary depending on the principal and the position. The more important the position the longer the interview and the process. One particular characteristic which will help or hurt is the attitude of the applicant. A trained administrator will have little trouble in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of a particular candidate.

Most districts will adhere to some type of written guideline to hire the most qualified applicant.